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ABSTRACT

Changes in the composition and attitudes of the work force have resulted in increased interest by employers in formulating and implementing career development efforts for their employees. Surveys have revealed. companies believe that career development efforts enhance employee performance and improve utilization of talents; most organizations have some sort of career development activity and it is receiving increased attention; there is little agreement about how to make programs operational; and research has generally not preceded development and implementation. Research into the psychology of adult development can be applied to career development as well. By utilizing the process of adult development, individuals can be encouraged to achieve their full career potential, thereby benefiting both the individual and the organization. Current approaches to career development involve: (1) individual career planning and counseling; (2) assessment; (3) career information services; (4) organizational career planning; (5) training and development; and (6) approaches aimed at special populations. Although much variety exists in these practices, it is clear that career development endeavors are significant undertakings in a rapidly increasing number of work settings. This fact sheet includes a bibliography of three resources, two of which are available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system. (DC)

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# Career Development in the Work Place.

OVERVIEW: ERIC Fact Sheet No. 11.

by

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ERIC OVERVIEW

FACT SHEET No. 11

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

# CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORK PLACE

## SOME FACTS

During the last ten to fifteen years, major changes have occurred in the composition of the work force: it has become older, many workers have less interest in professional achievement as a primary life focus, and ambition and education have increased among women and minorities. Consequently, employer attitudes toward their employees' occupational well-being have begun to change – the result being increased interest in formulating and implementing career development efforts that will mutually benefit the workers as well as the employer.

Although the concept of career development is not new, systematic research on existing practices and procedures in employer-sponsored career development activities is an emerging area. The survey research that has been undertaken in the area reveals the following beliefs and practices:

- The majority of companies surveyed believe that career planning or development efforts enhance job performance and equip employees to use personnel systems more effectively.
- The majority of respondents believe that career planning improves the utilization of employee talents, and that this endeavor would not be disruptive to their organization.
- In some way, most organizations are involved in a career development activity, although it may be informal and unsystematic.
- Career planning as a corporate interest is receiving increased attention.
- There is little agreement as to how to make career planning/development efforts operational, despite both management support and the precedents set by a few large conglomerates that have had such programs in existence for decades.
- To a great extent, research has not preceded the development and implementation of many of the career planning/development programs currently in place.

## BACKGROUND PERSPECTIVE

Several issues have arisen over the past years that encourage both employers and employees to give serious thought to the role of career development efforts. One such area is increased research into the psychology of adult development. Several theoretical models on both adult development and adult career development have been constructed from this research. Employers can benefit if they view adult career development as runnning a parallel course to the individual's personal development.

The theories of personal development that can be viewed concurrently with those of career development emphasize task, transition, or theme models, and have been described by authors such as Sheehy in *Passages* and Levinson in *Seasons of a Man's Life*. Although each model views development differently, all see the process as a continuum in which one passes through several phases of change. These periods of change are enhanced and influenced by personal and work experiences. It is through these processes that workers evolve an understanding of their capabilities and develop career-oriented goals.

This type of self-knowledge has led to an increase in employee needs for job satisfaction. Consequently, employers have become more interested in alleviating employee job dissatisfaction. In trying to solve this problem, many employers have benefited by implementing career development efforts that recognize and utilize the process of adult development so that individuals are encouraged to achieve their full career potential.

A career development effort thereby benefits not only the individual but also the organization. Several employer goals are met through career development programs: increased productivity, reduced attrition, and enhancement of employer appraisal and evaluation capacities. In addition, the organization becomes better able to forecast and identify personnel needs.

## CURRENT APPROACHES

Several approaches to career development are currently used in American industries, institutions, and organizations. The approaches are briefly described as follows:

**Individual Career Planning and Counseling.** Individual career planning and counseling, conducted on either a formal or informal basis, serves a variety of functions, including planning for upward mobility, lateral or downward transfer, or outplacement. Individual career planning and counseling methods may include face-to-face sessions with a trained vocational counselor, exploratory workshops, or participation in a self-directed evaluation process consisting of workbooks, audio-visual material, or written guides designed to pinpoint the individual's occupational capability and/or career interests. All of these techniques are designed to direct the employee toward achieving optimal job satisfaction and placement.

**Assessment.** The use of formal paper and pencil psychological tests is currently being re-examined in terms of fairness-in-tesing issues and the emergence of other assessment procedures such as self-assessment techniques and employee evaluation and appraisal. Where formal tests are used, their results are evaluated concurrently with information obtained through less formal methods. Additionally, a number of companies have made interest inventory tests available to their employees to assist in determining career goals.

**Career Information Services.** The focus of the career information services effort is to provide the employee with specific and up-to-date career information. The procedures used

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involve job posting, communication of affirmative action programs, presentation of policies, and information on continuing education opportunities or training workshops. Some organizations house all of this information in a career resource center staffed by individuals who can explain and guide individuals to appropriate services.

**Organizational Career Planning.** Organizational career planning approaches career development from a slightly different vantage point: that of foresightful planning for the future of the organization (rather than the individual) so that progress and change are thoughtfully engineered. Some of the methods employed are succession planning, fostering the development of abilities in talented employees, and internal recruitment and development planning geared toward retention and growth of employees. This latter method can consist of internships or job enrichment strategies. These procedures are often useful in predesigned "fast-track" programs where talented employees are quickly identified and placed in jobs designed to accelerate their upward movements in the organization.

**Training and Development.** Training and development programs are geared toward improving the knowledge and performance of employees not only to increase efficiency in their present job, but also to train them for upcoming jobs. Employees are assisted in developing better communication skills, skills specific to jobs in the employing organization, and skills needed to develop and implement an individual career plan. Additionally, in light of an aging work force, this practice can also assist employees in developing a plan for life after retirement.

**Special Populations and Practices.** Another emerging area in both research and practice is career development of special populations such as women, minorities, preretireees, midcareer employees, and other groups deserving special attention. Special population groups are assisted in a variety of ways: through special counseling geared toward encouraging the individual to consider career options or training previously not considered, participation in specially designed educational programs aimed at advancing nonmanagement track employees into managerial positions, or other educational methods designed to develop decision making, problem solving, or conflict management skills in individuals who previously would not have had access to such knoweldge. Fostering the career development of individuals with subprofessional career status appears to be a growing trend.

## CONCLUSION

As noted previously, there has been no uniform nor systematic method for conducting career development practices such as the ones discussed in this article. Much of what determines how a practice is implemented and utilized has depended upon its location within an organization, available funding, and specific needs of the organizations. Although much variety exists in the design and function of these practices, it is clear that career development endeavors are significant undertakings in a rapidly increasing number of work settings across the country

Examples of companies or organizations that employ the methods described here are —

Anheuser-Busch, Inc., St. Louis, Missouri,
Bache Halsey Stuart Shields, Inc., New York, New York,
Disneyland, Anaheim California
General Electric, Croton-on-Hudson, New York,
Goddard and Space Flight Center (NASA),
Greenbelt, Maryland
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory,
Livermore, California
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University,
Blacksburg, Virginia.

## REFERENCES

This Overview is based on the following publication:

Lancaster, A., and Berne, R. *Employer-sponsored Career Development Programs.* Information Series No. 231, $5.10. Columbus: The ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1981. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 205 779.

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Walker, J., and Gutteridge, T. *Career Planning Practices: An AMA Survey Report.* New York: AMACON, a division of American Management Association, 1979.

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